



# Department of Justice

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## **THREE PLEAD GUILTY TO CONSPIRACY FOR ROLES IN STOLEN GOODS TRAFFICKING RING**

COLUMBUS - Three Columbus men involved in a conspiracy to traffick stolen items through small convenience markets in central Ohio have pled guilty in United States District Court here to conspiracy, money laundering and related charges.

Ahmad Almansour, age 31, pled guilty today to one count each of conspiracy to transport stolen merchandise in interstate commerce, transportation of stolen merchandise in interstate commerce, and conspiracy to launder money.

In August, Khalil T. Alawareh, age 42, and his son, Fuad Alawareh, age 19, each pled guilty to one count of conspiracy to transport stolen merchandise in interstate commerce and one count of conspiracy to launder money.

Gregory G. Lockhart, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Ohio; Stanley J. Borgia, Special Agent in Charge, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Cincinnati Field Division; Cromwell Handy, Special Agent in Charge, Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation; and Franklin County Sheriff James Karnes announced the pleas entered before United States District Judge Edmund A. Sargus, Jr.

The three were arrested following the execution of more than 30 search warrants by teams of federal, state and local law enforcement agencies on April 22, 2005. More than 27 others were arrested and prosecuted by Franklin County Prosecuting Attorney Ronald J. O'Brien.

According to a statement of facts filed with Almansour's plea agreement, Almansour began buying stolen over-the-counter medications, infant formula and various beauty aids in 1999 while working at the Cleveland Market, 2323 Cleveland Avenue. Small time thieves and shoplifters would bring stolen merchandise to the market and sell it for a fraction of its value. Almansour shipped the stolen merchandise to individuals in the Lexington, Kentucky area, who bought it and shipped it to wholesalers in other states for further distribution.

Over time, Almansour expanded his operation, obtaining interests in at least five other markets. Almansour formed a variety of corporations, which he used to run these markets and in 2001 recruited Khalil Alhawawreh to work with him.

In 2002, the individuals in Kentucky, who were buying the stolen merchandise from Almansour were charged federally with interstate shipment of stolen merchandise. Following their indictment, Almansour took over their distribution business.

In April 2003, Almansour formed a business known as Mid-Ohio Wholesale and Distributing. Eventually, he leased warehouses in the Dublin, Hilliard and Columbus areas. He used these locations to accumulate and store the stolen merchandise from the markets; clean the merchandise to remove labels, anti-theft devices, etc.; repackage the merchandise; and ship it interstate to other distributors. Almansour also purchased stolen merchandise from individuals in other states, who transported the merchandise to the warehouse in Dublin.

Over time, Fuad Alhawawreh, the son of Khalil Alhawawreh joined the conspiracy. Fuad Alhawawreh worked from time to time at the Mid-Ohio Wholesale warehouse, assisting Almansour in preparing the stolen merchandise for shipment interstate.

Almansour used bank accounts in the names of Mid-Ohio Wholesale and Quick Pic Market to launder the money he received from the sale of this stolen merchandise. Agents traced more than \$9 million deposited into the Quick Pic account from Mid-Ohio checks and withdrawn in cash in 2003 and 2004.

“Evidence indicates that Almansour and his co-conspirators bought and sold more than \$2,500,000 in stolen merchandise between 1999 and April 2005,” Lockhart said. “This merchandise was shipped in interstate commerce to wholesalers who bought and resold it.” Money laundering conspiracy carries a punishment of up to 20 years imprisonment. The punishment for interstate transportation of stolen property is ten years, and conspiracy to commit interstate transportation of stolen property carries a five year maximum. Judge Sargus will set a date for sentencing.

Agencies participating in the investigation, arrests and execution of the search warrants include (listed alphabetically):

**Bexley Police Department**  
**Columbus Police Department**  
**FBI**  
**Franklin County Sheriff’s Office**  
**Franklin County Prosecutor’s Office**  
**Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation**  
**Ohio Department of Public Safety**  
**Ohio State Highway Patrol**  
**Ohio State University Police Department**  
**U.S. Department of Agriculture - Office of the Inspector General**  
**U.S. Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement**  
**U.S. Defense Criminal Investigative Service**  
**U.S. Marshals Service**  
**U.S. Secret Service**

Lockhart commended the cooperative investigation between federal, state and local law enforcement and prosecutors. The investigative agencies also expressed appreciation to Target and Walgreens for their logistical support in the investigation.

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